

KEITH MEAD, one of Wycombe Wanderers' most consistent defenders this season, misses tonight's (Tuesday) visit to Hitchin in the Rothmans Isthmian League, due to business commitments. Centre back Mead is likely to be replaced by Dave Bullock, the regular number five last term.

Wanderers may also have Mick Holifield back in the team which will mean either Dave Alexander or Howard Kennedy standing down. Otherwise, Wycombe will field the side that beat Slough 3-0 in the Senior Cup on Saturday.

Hitchin hope to field their full strength side, which means skipper Roger Grant and Tony Brothers should be in line to meet their old team-mates from Loakes Park. It was something of a surprise when left-back Grant left at the start of the season and he will be out to prove his worth.

As a team, Hitchin have found most of their success in cup matches this season — but only after a long, hard struggle. At one stage this term they played 19 cup games without defeat including a large number of replays. They almost joined Wycombe, Leatherhead and Wimbledon as F.A. Cup giant-killers by holding fourth division Cambridge United to a 0-0 draw at Topfield, before losing the replay 3-0.

On the way to the first round they beat Hemel Hempstead, St. Albans, Dunstable and Barnet. They also beat Southern League Barnet in the F.A. Trophy but then went down to Bedford after a replay.

All these cup games go a long way to explaining Hitchin's position of 19th in the league. In fact, they have played as many as eight fewer games than some other clubs, and seem certain to lift themselves further up the table now their cup commitments are over.

Hitching have a couple of new faces at Topfield this season. Goalkeeper Doug Parkin joined at the start of the season, while the veteran Maurice Howkins rejoined the club as did Paul Giggle.